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ABSTRACT

In response to recent statistics indicating a 20 percent decline in the ability of the average 17-year-old to analyze, interpret, and express views about written prose, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recommends a number of changes in the elementary school social studies curriculum to provide more opportunities for students to practice writing and analytical skills. Writing can be optimized as a learning tool to sharpen social studies information and concepts; to develop thinking skills such as inference making, classification, and analysis; and to further the development and refinement of writing techniques. Research provides insight into the writing process and suggests that teachers develop appropriate activities to assist students during the prewriting, composing, and rewriting stages of the writing process. An example of a facilitative prewriting activity in social studies would be the gathering of information from older citizens through personal interviews, which can be used as a catalyst for future composing activities. Careful integration of writing and social studies can best maximize the already limited time available for social studies instruction. In order to successfully integrate instruction in writing and social studies in the elementary classroom, effective writing instruction must be part of a coherent, systematic, developmental program of studies in which attention is paid to substance as well as technique. The document lists 11 resources, available through the ERIC system, from which additional information can be obtained. (LH)

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INTEGRATING WRITING AND SOCIAL STUDIES, K-6

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Jun 82

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FACT SHEET NO. 6

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Integrating Writing and Social Studies, K-6

Johnny may be able to read, but can he write?

Not as well as his counterparts could ten years ago, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The results of NAEP's 1979-1980 National Assessment of Reading and Literature showed that the ability of 17-year-olds to analyze, interpret, and express their views about written prose had declined by approximately 20 percent since 1971. Only 41 percent of the students tested in 1980 were able to compose reasoned, thoughtful answers.

In their report of the study (*Reading, Thinking, and Writing,* available from NAEP, Suite 700, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, CO 80295), the NAEP researchers recommended a number of changes in the curriculum to provide more opportunities for students to practice writing and analytical skills. One recommendation was the incorporation of writing into instruction in all subject areas. Obviously, if such an approach is to be effective, it must be instituted long before Johnny is 17. Writing must begin in the elementary school — as early as possible and as often as possible.

Few would disagree with that statement in principle. But in practice, elementary teachers with little explicit training in the use of writing with young children and barely enough time to include social studies in the curriculum may not be eager to add this new element to their program without a convincing rationale and some tools for doing so.

Why should elementary school teachers be concerned about writing in social studies?

Four reasons come readily to mind. First, although writing is often considered to be a valid instructional goal in elementary school, it is rarely viewed as the learning tool that it is — or could be. In reality, we learn as we write. We invent ideas, see relationships, and learn information as we try to describe, explain, illustrate, or justify something to someone in writing. Social studies teachers can use writing as a tool for helping students learn social studies information and concepts.

Second, the writing skills introduced in language arts classes must be used across other curriculum areas if they are to be mastered by children. Writing abilities grow and develop as the content and concepts used become increasingly complex and sophisticated and purposes change from entertaining to informing and persuading. By providing instructive opportunities to write in elementary social studies, we can help students refine, expand, and further develop their writing skills.

Third, writing is a social act — a purposeful interaction between someone with something to say and someone to whom that information is being related. Social studies thus serves as a most useful arena in which to develop and use writing, since one of its prime functions is to develop the skills of and knowledge about social interaction.

Finally, writing is actually thinking in action. It involves relationship-making and relationship-sensing as youngsters seek to connect bits of information in order to form or support ideas they infer from this information. Writing also involves a host of other cognitive skills, including classifying, analyzing, and evaluating. Writing can thus serve as a useful tool for teaching various thinking skills — skills that are a time-honored objective of the elementary school curricula.

Do we know enough about how young children learn to write to teach writing effectively in social studies?

Yes. Research over the past decade has provided considerable insight into how young children compose, as well as knowledge about a variety of instructional techniques that help them improve the ways they compose. The problem is that the results of this research have not generally filtered through to classroom teachers, curriculum planners, and textbook authors.

What are some of the insights this research has provided?

Some of the research with the most direct implications for classroom teachers focuses on the writing process. A number of researchers have broken the writing process into three stages: (1) the prewriting stage, in which the writer thinks through the task, planning and organizing what will be written, (2) the composing stage, in which the actual writing takes place, and (3) the rewriting stage, in which the writer clarifies, refines, and revises ideas, proofreads, and prepares the material for sharing. The research on these stages of the writing process suggests that teachers can design appropriate activities to assist students — even very young students — with all these stages of writing.

What, for example, might be an appropriate activity for developing prewriting skills in social studies?

Deciding on something worth writing about is one of the initial and most difficult challenges facing any writer. The task may be particularly difficult for the beginning, elementary-age writer. But social studies content provides an ideal "bank" of material to write about, and teachers can stimulate students' interest in writing about this material in a number of ways. For example, in the Wichita Public Schools, during the annual "Gran Celebration" — a week-long event to honor and learn from older citizens of the community — students gather information from older citizens through interviews. The results of these interviews often serve as the grist for writing activities long after the celebration is over. A teacher in the Parkway School District near St. Louis reports showing children pictures of a family in another culture, telling the children a story that illustrates something about that family's way of life, and then using a series of structured questions to help the children create their own stories. Many other prewriting activities based on social studies content can be developed; the key is allowing students ample time to discover that they have something they want to say.

By teaching writing skills in elementary social studies, aren't we taking away from the already-limited time we have to develop students' understanding of social studies content?

A program in which writing and social studies complement each other will include not only social studies activities that develop writing skills, but also writing activities that help

The material for this fact sheet was extracted from *Writing in Elementary School Social Studies,* edited by Barry K. Beyer and Robert Gilstrap (Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium and ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1982), which can be ordered from SSEC Publications, 855 Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302 (ISBN 0-89994-267-9; $10.95). (See ED 213 631)

students learn social studies information and develop social studies generalizations. Students can use writing to learn the information and ideas they are studying. They can use writing to invent ideas about a topic that can serve as hypotheses for testing by further study. They can also write about an event from the points of view of the different people involved in order to develop empathy for these people as well as to acquire new insights about the subject. By writing specific examples of ideas or concepts, students can develop important social studies generalizations.

Activities through which these objectives can be met are as varied as the activities designed to meet other social studies objectives. Students can write letters to people in the news, prepare scripts for mock trials, write "autobiographies" of historical figures, use writing to conduct "fantasy field trips," or write poems about their state's history and geography. These are, of course, only a few of the many ways in which writing and social studies content can be fused in elementary classrooms, but they illustrate that the two can reinforce one another.

What is necessary to successfully integrate instruction in writing and social studies in the elementary school classroom?

At least three specific conditions are required. First, teachers must be aware of what techniques are useful in developing writing skills and must use those techniques in a manner that is consistent with good classroom practice. Second, certain kinds of support for classroom teachers are needed. Supports that would go far toward making successful integration of writing and social studies a reality would be a detailed curriculum guide, inservice teacher training, and cooperative teacher/administrator assessment procedures.

Finally, effective writing instruction in elementary school social studies must be part of a coherent, systematic, developmental program of studies. Such a program has three essential features: sequential development of specific writing skills, careful integration of writing with social studies instruction, and provision for direct skill instruction throughout the program. The ideal elementary school social studies/writing curriculum is one that helps students in each grade level reinforce skills learned in preceding grades while developing new skills needed to carry out tasks that will be introduced in subsequent grades, all in the context of content appropriate to the specific grade and subject. What students write about — the content they use and the ideas they seek to develop and communicate — is as important in social studies teaching as how they go about their writing. Effective integration of writing and social studies requires attention to substance as well as to technique.

What resources for teaching writing in social studies are available through the ERIC system?

The references listed below are only a few examples of the many useful resources on this topic that have been entered into the ERIC system. Most, although not all, ERIC documents (ED listings below) are available for viewing in microfiche at libraries that subscribe to the ERIC collection. Microfiche copies of these documents can also be purchased from ERIC Document Reproduction Service (P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210). Paper copies of some ED documents can also be purchased from EDRS, while others are available from the original publisher. Check *Resources in Education* for ordering information.

Journal articles (EJ listings below) are not available in microfiche. If your local library does not have the relevant issue of a journal, you may be able to obtain a reprint from University Microfilms (300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106), which provides this service for many of the journals indexed in ERIC. Check the *Current Index to Journals in Education* for availability information.

ED 198 565. *Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8*, edited by Shirley M. Haley-James (National Council of Teachers of English, 1981). Summarizes the best current thinking about what classroom approaches produce sound writing experiences in grades 1-8. Successful teaching practices and writing programs are detailed.

ED 193 658. *A Guide to Tailoring Writing Assignments for the Mainstreamed Child*, edited by Irene M. Diamond and others (Wisconsin Writing Project, 1980). Offers teachers practical strategies for tailoring general writing assignments to meet the individual needs of mainstreamed educationally disadvantaged and learning disabled students.

ED 176274 *A Guide to Teaching the Writing Process from Pre-Writing to Editing*, edited by Marjorie Smelstor (Wisconsin Writing Project, 1978). Suggests activities to use in teaching the three stages of the composition process; these include activities specifically designed for use in social studies.

ED 152 603. *People, Parties and Politics: 35 Jumbo Activity Cards for Teaching Reading/Writing Skills in Social Studies* (Sandra Schurr Publications, 1978). Provides 35 supplementary activities on American politics for use in elementary and junior high schools. Many of the activities stress reading and writing skills.

EJ 226 130. "Writing Local History: A New Look at Old Portsmouth," by Deborah Fox Howard and others. *Childhood Education* 56, no. 5 (April/May 1980), pp. 264-267. Presents a learning activity for involving 9- to 11-year-olds in history writing.

EJ 199 416. "Writing and Critical Thinking in the Social Studies," by Henry A. Giroux. *Curriculum Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 291-310. Examines traditional theoretical assumptions about the pedagogy of writing and critical thinking and shows how they are linked. Illustrates how writing can be used as a vehicle to help students learn and think critically about any social studies topic.

EJ 198 673. "The Time It Takes: Managing/Evaluating Writing and Social Studies," by Barry K. Beyer and Anita Brostoff. *Social Education* 43, no. 3 (March 1979), pp. 194-197. Suggest methods to help social studies teachers integrate writing into courses and to decrease time spent in evaluating student writing.

EJ 198 670. "Good Assignments Lead to Good Writing," by Anita Brostoff. *Social Education* 43, no. 3 (March 1979), pp. 184-186. Describes principles that achieve good writing assignments in the social studies.

EJ 198 669. "Developmental Writing: Social Studies Assignments," by Raymond Ventre. *Social Education* 43, no. 3 (March 1979), pp. 181-183. Presents guidelines for social studies teachers and a sample writing assignment to encourage students' developmental writing.

EJ 198 668. "Writing and the Generation of Knowledge," by A.D. Van Nostrand. *Social Education* 43, no. 3 (March 1979), pp. 178-180. Explains how students gain knowledge through the act of writing as they join bits of information into a whole; presents a model for scanning students' written material to determine the way ideas are related.

ED 209 641 CS 006 351

Reading, Thinking and Writing: Results from the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature.

Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo. National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Spons Agency—National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, D.C.; National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, D.C.

Report No.—ISBN-0-89398-110-9; NAEP-11-L-01

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Note—82p.

Pub Type— Reports - Research (143)

EDRS Price - MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.

Descriptors—Criterion Referenced Tests, *Critical Reading, *Critical Thinking, Elementary Secondary Education, *Literature Appreciation, *National Competency Tests, Reading Comprehension, Reading Skills, *Student Evaluation, *Writing Skills

Identifiers—*National Assessment of Educational Progress, Second Literature Third Reading Assessment (1980)

The results of the 1979-80 reading and literature assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are contained in this report. In addition to the national results, the report describes the performance of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students in various cohorts defined by geographic region, sex, race/ethnicity, parental education, and size and type of community. The primary focus of the report is upon the written responses of students to works of literature when they were asked to analyze them, defend their initial reactions to the works, evaluate works, or simply respond to them in any way they deemed appropriate. In addition, the report provides information about the students' reading habits and attitudes, as well as their knowledge of literary works, characters, and conventions. The findings presented in the report indicate (1) that most students lacked systematic strategies for examining what they read in order to understand it fully, and (2) that although students could make sound initial responses to works, they did not appear to know how to support or explain their responses in any but the most superficial ways. The report discusses the implications of the findings and suggests that school administrators and teachers take a variety of steps to address the problems raised by them. Primary type of information provided by report: Results (Selective) (Change). (FL)

ED 213 631 SO 013 896

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Writing in Elementary School Social Studies.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colo.; Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colo.

Spons Agency—National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, D.C.

Report No.—ISBN-0-89994-267-9

Pub Date—82

Contract—400-78-0006

Note—205p.

Available from—Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 855 Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302 ($10.95).

Pub Type— Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) — Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)

EDRS Price - MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.

Descriptors—Case Studies, Classroom Environment, Educational Research, Elementary Education, Models, Self Concept, *Social Studies, *Teaching Methods, Writing Instruction, Writing Readiness, Writing Research, *Writing Skills

This book is designed to provide elementary school teachers with information, suggestions, and models for using writing in the social studies, from early primary to middle grades. There are four major chapters to the book. Chapter I is titled "Research on the Teaching of Writing." The articles in this first section move from a survey of research in writing to a survey of classroom practice in the use of writing in elementary school social studies and finally to a specific classroom study that integrates the two areas and presents specific implications for the study and teaching of writing. Chapter II is titled "Developing Readiness in Writing." The first two articles stress two important aspects of a classroom environment that nurtures and supports student writing. The remaining five articles describe techniques such as interviewing, exploring the past, and brainstorming that teachers can use to initiate writing. The title of Chapter III which contains seven articles is "Using Writing to Learn Social Studies Content." The articles describe ways in which writing can be used to help students learn social studies information or develop social studies generalizations. Another describes how writing can be used to conduct simulated field trips in the social studies classroom. The title of Chapter IV is "Combining Writing with Social Studies." Discussed are three essential supports for a successful program: a detailed curriculum guide, inservice teacher training, and cooperative teacher/administrator assessment procedures. The book also cites related resources in the ERIC system. (Author/RM)